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NSC BRIEFING

28 January 1959

SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN UNION

- I. Syrian-Egyptian union may be formally announced within the week.
Draft constitution due next August.
 - A. Egypt's objective is to maintain influence in Syria and ward off possible Communist take-over.
 - B. Syrian motivation stems from socialist-nationalist and army fears that pro-Soviet and Communist elements might seize control in the near future.
 1. This pro-Egyptian element believes that its salvation lies in a Nasir-dominated union between the two countries.
 2. Nasir insists that he has been "put in a corner" and has no option but to acquiesce in union, otherwise effective opposition to a Communist takeover would be destroyed.
 - C. Egyptian terms for union are harsh:
 1. The Syrian army taken out of politics;
 2. Political parties dissolved;
 3. Communists and "corrupt" conservative elements suppressed.
 4. *Nasir will control key appointments*
- II. General agreement has been reached, but actual implementation of union *will bring* a host of tangible and intangible problems. These include:
 - A. How to run a state physically split by Israel.
 - B. Finding suitable jobs for Syrian army officers in the unified army will be a touchy business; prestige and power considerations are involved.

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C. Economic obstacles are considerable--the merging of the free Syrian economy with the state-controlled Egyptian system will provide many headaches.

III. The people of the Arab world, particularly in Jordan and Iraq, will, look upon the union as an historic step forward toward the long cherished goal of a unified Arab state.

IV. Official reactions are reserved or apprehensive.

A. In Jordan the government will be subject to great pressure to make a step in the direction of union with Syria...this pressure will include anti-government actions.

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C. Israel will view Egyptian-Syrian union with strong disfavor, because it raises the spectre of a more unified Arab world on its extensive borders.

1. The Israelis can be expected to step up efforts to secure stronger guarantees of its borders from the West, especially the US.

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2. They eventually might be tempted to repeat the Suez operation, possibly aimed at Damascus, if the Arabs seem to be gaining military superiority.

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